

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL  
HEALTH CONSORTIUM  
ALEUTIAN PEBILOF  
ISLANDS ASSOCIATION  
ARCTIC SLOPE  
NATIVE ASSOCIATION  
BRISTOL BAY AREA  
HEALTH CORPORATION  
CHICKALOON VILLAGE  
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL  
CHUGACHMIUT  
COPPER RIVER  
NATIVE ASSOCIATION  
COUNCIL OF  
ATHABASCAN  
TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS  
EASTERN ALEUTIAN  
TRIBES  
KARLUK IRA  
TRIBAL COUNCIL  
KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE  
KETCHIKAN  
INDIAN COMMUNITY  
KODIAK AREA  
NATIVE ASSOCIATION  
MANIILAQ ASSOCIATION  
METLAKATLA INDIAN  
COMMUNITY  
MT. SANFORD  
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM  
NATIVE VILLAGE  
OF EKLUTNA  
NATIVE VILLAGE  
OF EYAK  
NATIVE VILLAGE  
OF TYONEK  
NINILCHIK  
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL  
NORTON SOUND  
HEALTH CORPORATION  
SELDOVIA  
VILLAGE TRIBE  
SOUTHCENTRAL  
FOUNDATION  
SOUTHEAST ALASKA  
REGIONAL HEALTH  
CONSORTIUM  
TANANA CHIEFS  
CONFERENCE  
YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE  
YUKON-KUSKOKWIM  
HEALTH CORPORATION  
VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

# Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

■ 907.562.6006 ■ 907.563.2001 • 4000 Ambassador Drive, Suite 101 • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • [www.anhb.org](http://www.anhb.org)

May 17, 2017

Chairman Ajit Pai  
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, WC Docket No 02-60  
Actions to Accelerate Broadband-Enabled Health Care Solutions, GN Docket No 16-46

Dear Chairman Pai and FCC Commissioners:

Thank you for your support of the Rural Health Care Program. As you recognized in a recent Senate Commerce Committee FCC Oversight hearing, broadband telemedicine is a critical component of addressing the health care needs of Alaskans.

Established in 1968, Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB) serves as the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues. ANHB is a 28-member representing tribes and tribal organizations carrying out health services on behalf of the 229 federally recognized Tribes in Alaska. ANHB's purpose is to promote the spiritual, physical, mental, social and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people.

As the statewide tribal health advocacy organization, ANHB assists the Alaska Tribal Health System (ATHS), state and federal agencies with achieving effective communication and consultation. The ATHS is comprised of a voluntary affiliation of over 30 Alaskan tribes and tribal organizations providing health services to over 158,000 Alaska Natives/American Indians (AN/AIs) and as the only health provider in many of their respective communities, serve thousands more Non-AN/AI people.

On May 10, 2017 the ANHB Board of Directors passed Resolution 02-2017 Urging the Federal Communications Commission to Increase the Rural Health Care Program Budget (enclosed). Telemedicine has allowed our Members to dramatically improve access to care, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, avoid unnecessary medivacs and expand local treatment options. It has also helped reduce Medicaid costs. Access to high speed Internet connectivity has greatly improved medication management, reduced hospital re-admittance, increased patient safety and brings a sense of security for all who manage the patients' care.

The AHS is comprised of facilities that are funded by the Indian Health Service and many also are Community Health Clinics. Our facilities cannot raise service rates to compensate for the increase in costs for due to the proration that is proposed. This unexpected and unbudgeted expense will directly impact the AHS' patient programs resulting in cuts to personnel, programs, direct health services and possibly result in clinic closures.

We ask that you take steps to ensure both the near and long-term viability of the Rural Health Care Program to meet the increased demand for telemedicine services both in Alaska and across the country. We believe that the FCC should increase the budget for the rural health care support mechanisms to reflect inflation over the past two decades, as well as increased technology and telecommunications demands due to HIPAA legal obligations, advances in telemedicine capabilities, changes in patient expectations and standards of care, and new demands from skilled nursing facilities.

In addition, please consider implementing an inflation adjustment mechanism for the future, and short-term measures to restore qualifying funding requests filed Sept. 1 - Nov. 30, 2016 to 100 percent.

Thank you for your support of this important program.

Sincerely,

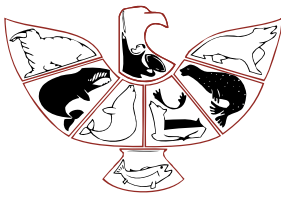
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'V. Boerner', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Verné Boerner  
ANHB President and CEO

Encl: ANHB Resolution No. 02-2017

CC:

The Honorable Senator Murkowski  
The Honorable Senator Sullivan  
The Honorable Congressman Young



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## Resolution No. 02-2017

**TITLE: RESOLUTION URGING THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION TO INCREASE THE RURAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM BUDGET**

**WHEREAS**, the Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB), a 28-member organization established in 1968, is recognized as the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues representing the Alaska Tribal Health System (ATHS), and

**WHEREAS**, the ATHS is comprised of a voluntary affiliation of over 30 Alaskan tribes and tribal organizations providing health services to over 158,000 Alaska Natives/American Indians and as the only health provider in many of their respective communities, serve thousands more; and

**WHEREAS**, numerous Treaties and the Constitution have established the Federal Trust Responsibility and forms a unique government-to-government relationship between the federal government and American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people, which establishes the legal basis by which the United States has committed to protecting the health and well-being of America's first citizens in perpetuity; and

**WHEREAS**, the severe and chronic underfunding of the Indian Health Service is a failure to meet this Trust Responsibility resulting in the loss of purchasing power and diminution of services; and

**WHEREAS**, access to broadband internet goes beyond providing Telehealth, the lack of broadband access threatens the entire tribal health delivery infrastructure, affecting the electronic health record and the associated federal requirements; and

**WHEREAS**, the Federal Communication Commission's Rural Health Care Program is essential in enabling providers to deliver affordable health/telehealth services in rural Alaska communities as a part of the Alaska Tribal Health System; and

**WHEREAS**, the FCC published a notice in August 2016, for FY16 indicating the following filing windows for form 466 to USAC to request the funding for FY2017: (1) March 1, 2016 – September 1, 2016, and (2) September 1, 2016 – November 30, 2016. The Commission anticipated that there would be a third filing window of February 1, 2017 – April 30, 2017; and

**WHEREAS**, USAC announced on April 10, 2017 that they will apply a cut to the subsidy in FY2017 for those clinics where USAC received application Form 466 during the 2nd filing window and fund them at 92.5% of the qualifying funding requested; and

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**WHEREAS**, the proration will result in increased telecom costs, which were not budgeted for, in the hundreds of thousands to individual Tribal Health programs that do not have the ability to raise service rates to compensate for the increase, which will necessitate cuts to personnel, programs, direct health services, and possible clinic closures; and

**WHEREAS**, the Rural Health Care Program budget has remained static for 20 years, and the current \$400,000,000 budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation, advances in technology, and increased demand for services; and

**WHEREAS**, the Federal Communications Commission recently updated the E-rate budget for schools, from \$2,250,000,000 in 1997 to \$3,940,000,000 in 2015, and indexed it for inflation, reflecting increases in demand; and

**WHEREAS**, the Federal Communications Commission expects that demand may exceed the cap for the first time in 2016, and an equivalent budget today, adjusted for inflation, would be approximately \$600,000,000; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2015, state rural health care providers received more than \$82,000,000, 20.5 percent of the total budget, in rural health care support, an increase of 35 percent, in dollars, from 2014; and

**WHEREAS**, rural health care support enables telehealth services to be provided that dramatically improve access to care, including mental and behavioral health care and substance abuse services; accelerate diagnosis and treatment; avoid unnecessary medivacs; and expand local treatment options; and

**WHEREAS**, the state has no funding obligation to the Rural Health Care Universal Service Support Fund;

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska Native Health Board urges the Federal Communications Commission to increase the Rural Health Care Program budget sufficiently to adjust for inflation, advances in technology and the services available with increased broadband, and the increase in demand for broadband-based services; and be it

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska Native Health Board urges the Federal Communications Commission to index the Rural Health Care Program budget for inflation and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to future funding years, ensuring that rural communities in the state continue to have access to affordable broadband telehealth services, critical for improving access to care.

#### **CERTIFICATION**

We hereby certify that that this resolution was duly passed by the Alaska Native Health Board by the full Board of Directors on the 10th day of May, 2017 in Anchorage, AK.

Attested:



Lincoln Bean, Sr., Chairman  
Alaska Native Health Board



Verné Boerner, President/CEO  
Alaska Native Health Board